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## Conversations Through Art Within and Between Cultural Boundaries

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This cross-cultural study explores the lives of two contemporary Korean/Korean American women artists, Suk Nam Yun, and Yong Soon Min, who respectively live in Seoul, South Korea, and Los Angeles, USA. My research focuses on their identity formation, artistic expression, their professional achievements and the role of art as a political act. I examine the impact of social, historical, political, and cultural forces, especially Confucianism on artistic expression, life experiences, and the status of women in Korean society, and Korean immigrants as ethnic minorities. I explore how their art expresses issues of cultural identity, self-identity and gender as a political act, and how their art making process contributes to their identity formation.

As an interpretive biographical case study, data were collected from sources such as review of their artworks, exhibition catalogues, written documents, and personal interviews with Yun and Min, which were documented, interpreted and analyzed.

The resulting comparative analysis indicates that both artists present a multifaceted consciousness of being Korean women-a cultural, feminist view; and the status of a Korean American immigrant-an ethnic minority identity view. Despite social and cultural barriers these women became artists, feminists, social, cultural and political activists while fulfilling traditional Confucian Korean family roles. The development of Suk Nam Yun and Yong Soon Min's cultural identity, self identity and gender was influenced by their life experiences in the social, cultural, historical, political, and educational environment in Korea and America. Yun and Min's life experiences had a direct influence on their artistic expression. For Yun and Min, art serves as the vehicle for searching, finding, and expressing their ethnic, cultural and self-identities.

Art making helps these artists reinforce political actions that express their personal motivations. Through the art making process and personal art expression they gained a voice, self-knowledge, and a sense of self.

Their art making contributed to their identity formation as it deals with issues of feminism, political and hybrid identity and art as political activism. Therefore, their art contributes to the formation of their self-identity and to their professional

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identities as artists, feminists, and cultural activists. I identified the richness of their lives in the context of their Korean/Korean American cultural identity, self identity and gender issues that interweave and inform their art as a political act that functions to affect democracy and social transformation.

This research is important for the understanding of other cultures, especially the lives of Korean women in a patriarchal Confucian society. Artists such as Suk Nam Yun, and Yong Soon Min serve as role models as cultural activists, educators, art community leaders and consciousness raising organizers that help others to reevaluate society from multiple perspectives. In this sense, these artists serve as important links among local communities, schools, museums, and art institutions. Furthermore, they function as mediators among national and international art communities and institutions. These artists fulfill the role of cross cultural critics, educators, and ambassadors between America, Korea and the broader global community.